



SMALL BUSINESS ADVOCACY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held March 29, 2016

8:30 am

Commerce RI

315 Iron Horse Way

Providence, RI

ATTENDANCE:

Lt Governor Daniel McKee
Manuel Batlle, RISBDC
Stephen Boyle, Cranston Chamber
Ralph Coppola, Meridian
Mark Deion, Deion Assoc.
Maureen Ewing, Secretary of State's Office
Gary Ezowski, Lincoln Environmental Properties
Ray Fogarty, Chafee Center for International Business
Barbara Goodrich, Lt. Governor's Office
Ed Huttenhower, RISBDC
David Lucier, Lucier
Melissa Long, Secretary of State Office
Terry Martiesian, Martiesian Law Assoc.
Dr. Edward Mazze, URI
Bill McCourt, RIMA
Erika Niedowski, Lt. Governor's Office
Don Nokes, NetCenergy
Janet Raymond, Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce
Liz Tanner, Commerce RI
Melissa Travis, Health Source RI

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order by Lieutenant Governor Daniel McKee at 8:37 am.

OPENING REMARKS:

Lieutenant Governor McKee thanked Liz Tanner from Commerce RI for assisting his referral, Bud McCann. He noted he has received several positive responses regarding how Commerce RI is helping the business community.

UPDATE FROM COMMERCE RI:

Liz Tanner from Commerce RI gave an update. The SBAC was provided the opportunity to view the newly designed state logo. The council also watched the video promoting Rhode Island which highlights different aspects of the state. These forms of media are all part of a campaign to promote the state and make positive changes to the business climate.

Municipal Initiatives:

Commerce presently has four communities going through training (Pawtucket, West Warwick, North Smithfield and Pawtucket) to make the business application process easier. The challenge, however, is creating efficiencies. The created scenario is "if you want to open a restaurant in 45 days". Participating communities will improve the opening to 25 days by reducing the number of forms required from 11 to 4 and eliminating visits to city hall. These results can be achieved with one small initiative...continuing with e-permitting. Liz informed the council that Commerce is very excited about this initiative.

Commerce has been compiling complaints from the business community, and after examining each complaint, have put plans in place to make changes and improvements. Some of these changes will require legislative requests. Some could not be changed, for example car tax, because it would create a \$13M loss of revenue to the state.

Liz challenges the SBAC to give her complaints, issues and concerns because she needs your feedback. She asked the council to please help lobby for the necessary legislative changes. A lead steering committee is in place consisting of some individuals who have asked to be involved. At present the focus has been placed on restaurants which requires 22 state forms. Efforts are continuously being made to make the process easier and more forms are being added to the e-permit process with plans to add more agencies to the site as well. They will also focus on hair salons, the trades, professional services, and IT companies.

Commerce is working with the Department of Revenue to revamp the process to obtain a letter of good standing. It should start to get smoother in a month, and the goal within the next few months is to reduce the number of steps from 155 to 16. Liz is also meeting with other agencies to help make similar streamlining improvements such as the Department of Health and DOT. Commerce has taken this mission to revamp the process on a "road show" (Rotaries, Chambers, etc.) speaking at over 60 events, many with over 1,000 attendees.

A discussion took place regarding the logo, noting the reaction has not been good to "cooler and warmer". Comments ranged from liking the creativity to if you have to ask what it means, it has impact. Suggestions were made to change the color of "We" so that it stands out on the WeareRI. This initiative is a campaign that will continue to be built upon.

Lieutenant Governor McKee stated we need to ignore those who have left the state psychologically and wish them well. He thanked Liz for her continued efforts to make improvements and working to get things done.

ECONOMIC SUMMIT REVIEW:

The general consensus is the summit was a big success. A suggestion was made that it should be mandatory for all legislators to attend.

A discussion ensued suggesting that the state needs to start by rebranding and promoting successes. In addition, we do not encourage a review process or evaluation of performance. We need to stop and look at what we do then look at it from another viewpoint. State agencies should survey those they serve and send a customer satisfaction survey as Commerce and DBR are doing. Responses can be anonymous. Self-evaluation for all levels of government should be encouraged. The “lean process” is to do it the best way possible, serving the people and not just saving money. The process of achieving a lean environment is a journey, and the process to maintain is also a journey. It was mentioned to use suggestion boxes as well as reaching out to people internally. A video with testimony of “successes” would have a positive impact.

Lieutenant Governor McKee agreed that every critique has value in it adding we need to reset our thinking and comprehend that this is a campaign. The SBAC is an advisory group and as a group is supposed to not only address the problems but also share the successes. The Lieutenant Governor continued by saying we need to open up our thinking on how to build this campaign. We need to retain some of our past but resetting is also very important. We need to focus on all aspects of the state, not just the “ocean” but all that the state has to offer.

The Lieutenant Governor announced in July, 2016 he will be the Chair to the National Lieutenant Governors Association. Rhode Island will be hosting the conference in July 2017. He continued to state that the members and staff of the NLGA are excited to be visiting our state.

SBAC STATUTE REVIEW:

The Lieutenant Governor told the council he would like to review and update the Statute for the SBAC. He asked those interested in volunteering to help this effort to sign up after the meeting. His office will notify the volunteers regarding meeting dates.

ENERGY ISSUES:

The website, with the assistance of the PUC, is now up and running. Visit RI.Gov/empowerRI. This is one of those successes that he is asking all members to share. The website is a valuable tool to help reduce energy costs and allows a 20-28% savings for business owners and residents on their energy purchase. In addition, through the efforts of his office, the 7% sales tax for some businesses has been removed. If 40% of our taxpayers take advantage of this savings, approximate savings throughout the state will be \$20M. He is speaking with Governor Raimondo’s office about developing a marketing plan to get this valuable information out to consumers. He made a point to note that the savings is big money, not small money. In speaking with some leaders from Massachusetts, they commented on the good job that was done on the website and want to model one after it. Since our intervention, National Grid will begin to procure differently and search for more competitive pricing. A question was raised as to why some businesses are not on the list? Lieutenant Governor will address it with those responsible for collecting the data and said they will continue to improve the information on the site.

NEW BUSINESS:

Lieutenant Governor McKee said it is important to push back against the status quo in order to move forward. He is continuing his education efforts to get Rhode Island's public schools at a level of achievement that is equivalent to Massachusetts stating by not doing so, we are denying earning power. Had we successfully reformed public education 15-18 years ago as Massachusetts did, our state would be seeing a \$2,000 per capita improvement.

The Lieutenant Governor is hosting a breakfast on April 21st at 8:00 am at Special Olympics, 370 George Washington Highway, Smithfield to discuss education initiatives. A Tripp Jones presentation will be made regarding how Massachusetts accomplished their success. He asked members to please sign up after the meeting if interested in attending. Lieutenant Governor McKee announced a non-profit, Get Smart RI, has been established to help raise money for this cause as well as to poll to see if the public is buying into this. He has also met with the Commissioner of Education to review the Governor's education incentives. He informed the SBAC that this is worth getting involved in because it is a very strong business economic mover.

One members asked "how are Charter Schools getting lost?" The Lieutenant Governor replied that we need to empower principals and embrace choice.

Approval of Minutes:

A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes of the December 15, 2015 SBAC meeting as presented. The motion was passed.

Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned at 10:24 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Goodrich
Executive Assistant to Lieutenant Governor Daniel J. McKee